To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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RELIGION

Problems in Meeting Religious Needs in the Rural-Urban Fringe

By Samuel W. Blizzard, Jr.*

Census data for 1950 made headlines when the phenomenal boom in suburban growth was reported. For a long time the trend in the United States had been for population to migrate from the country to the city. This movement still continues, but at the same time a new and more sensational shift is taking place in the movement of people to the suburban areas. This was dramatically shown in the 1950 census reports when it was reported that suburbs of the twelve largest cities in the United States had grown (during the preceding decade) at twice the rate of the cities they surround. Growth rates for suburbs often ranged from 50% to 100%. Growth rates of most cities were much smaller than had been predicted.

The suburbs are America's current boom towns. This is part of the urbanization process that has been going on in the United States for over a century. Quiet and serene countrysides are suddenly invaded by a new population group. Areas in the open country that were used for farming purposes are being turned into residential developments. Farmers find themselves plowing fields that are increasingly being invaded by the sidewalk and other symbols of urban life. This has changed the process of life radically in these rural areas and has altered the social structure.

A PROBLEM AREA

The phenomenal boom in population in the suburbs is only headline news momentarily. It is a continuing problem for residents of the suburbs and the people and organizations that serve the suburbanite. The principal difficulties in the fringe arise from the attempt to carry out a distinctively urban life without the benefit of regulated controls and facilities.

While residents of the suburban areas prefer some of the residential advantages of the country, they are related economically and occupationally to

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the city. There is a daily trek of people from the suburb to the city for work or other business requirements. This means that transportation facilities are overtaxed. Suburbanites are using streets and other public transportation facilities without paying taxes.

Country stores are overwhelmed by new customers. Theaters, hospitals, post offices, and libraries that formerly served small, trade-centered rural communities are overflowing with patrons. Schools are bulging with new students Classes are being held in church basements and temporary buildings. Housing becomes scarce, even though building may be going on at a fantastic rate. Real estate values rise suddenly so that the farmer cannot afford to cultivate his land

The suburb is like an army that has outrun its source of supplies. It contains a population group that needs to have water, gas, and electric lines extended, highways widened to care for increased traffic and to abolish transportation bottlenecks, new schools built, and churches erected. Fundamental city services, such as sanitation or fire and police protection, are often missing. An area that was a plowed field a year ago can hardly sprout these urban services suddenly.

In the central cities, to which these suburban areas are related, these new developments create problems also. Cities with fixed debts and expenses connected with their service systems find that many of their taxable citizens have moved out of the municipality, and yet the city must continue to provide some of these services. It continues to provide police and fire protection food inspection, sanitation facilities, and the control and regulation of business. Some of the businesses in town lose customers because the urbanite shops near his home.

The checkered and heterogeneous governmental set-up that is found in the suburban areas often is not able to meet the demand for these services. The township commissioner or the burgess of a small town is not experienced in providing this type of service. Often outside pressure must be brought to encourage local government officials to act on community needs.

Urban political structures do not easily adapt themselves to the expansion that is taking place in suburban areas. The laws for the annexation of fringe areas to cities in many states require that the landowner petition that his property be incorporated into the city. Most property owners are not anxious to have their property annexed to the city, because it usually means that taxes will be increased. The resident of the suburb would rather live on the life blood of the central city and enjoy its services without contributing to the nourishment that it needs to sustain itself.

Land use problems appear in their most acute form in the fringe. There is constant competition trying to determine the way in which land should be used. No one type of land utilization is predominant. Land is used for farming, for residences, and for commercial establishments. Each of these uses may depreciate the value of the land for either of the other two. People who build homes on highways leading from the city do not wish to have a commercial establishment set up alongside of their lots. Farmers cannot stand the taxes which must be levied if essential service, such as water and sewage, are to be provided for the new urban resident.

Because of this mixed land use one may find commercial farms mixed

with areas plotted for residential development, and trailer camps and squatter towns adjacent to country estates. Tank farms and golf courses may compete with weeds and brush. Scattered spottily through the area will be ribbon-like residential developments.

The price that one pays for a lot in the suburbs does not reflect necessarily the real cost that he will have to pay eventually. Subdivisions may not only lack essential services, but they are often subject to unregulated real estate speculation. One frustrating scene that is sometimes seen in the fringe is that of a farmer who is tilling land along sidewalks that he or his predecessor put down in anticipation of a residential development. The risk is great, and he who chances to enjoy the luxury of suburban living cannot dictate the price that may be required of him.

Problems of social control in the fringe area create special opportunities for the church because the fringe is often a no-man's-land politically and administratively. County and township governments often do not have adequate police protection to keep order. These governments were organized in the days when primary group controls were effective. They have not adjusted to the needs of the fringe community. Therefore, enterprises that wish to be beyond the control of government or away from the surveillance of police find a haven in the fringe. This creates a problem for church and community leaders who wish to give their children a wholesome environment in which to be reared.

A NEW TYPE OF SOCIETY

The movement of people to the outskirts of the city has meant that a new type of society is evolving in the United States. In the past we have thought of American life being divided into rural and urban society. Each of these has its own distinctive pattern of living. Suburban society has taken certain features of both rural and urban life and has welded them into its own type of culture. It has been called by various names. Rurban, a term introduced by Galpin, has been used by some rural sociologists to describe this mixture of rural and urban life. The suburbs or suburbia is used by the urban sociologists and frequently by the man on the street. During the last decade social scientists following Wehrwein have been calling it the fringe, because it is located in the transition zone where neither urban nor rural ways of life are dominant. From the point of view of census data, fringe dwellers have been included in the rural nonfarm category. The development of the urban fringe concept for the 1950 census has transferred many of these residents to the urban classification.

The fringe is an area where cultural developments are taking place outside of the political structure of cities and are extending out to the areas of dominant agricultural activities. It is a heterogeneous area in many respects; it is not closely knit but is made up of small subdivisions. An area occupied by tar-paper shacks may be near one of mansions; one-acre part-time farms may be interspersed among commercial farms; golf courses and cemeteries and other urban land uses may be scattered throughout the area. Businesses that could not normally operate under the laws of the city may locate in this area, either because of the obnoxious features of an industry or the desire to get away from the formal social controls of the city. The maturity of communities within the fringe will vary with the length of time that they have been settled and the socio-economic status of the people that live there. This wide variety in social organization presents a difficult situation for any institution that wishes to serve its population.

A TWO-DIRECTIONAL MIGRATION

People who move to the fringe come from two directions, from the country and from the city. This is confirmed by a number of research studies. For example, in Madison, Wisconsin, it was found that out of every ten persons who moved to the fringe, seven came from the urban areas and three from the rural areas. Six out of every ten household heads had been reared in a rural place. Similar findings have been reported for Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, and other cities. From the point of view of previous residents, the fringe dweller may be urban-oriented or rural-oriented. This is one factor that tends to make it difficult to develop a community spirit among the people.

REASONS FOR MOVING TO THE FRINGE

What are the reasons that lead people to move to the fringe? First, the development of transportation and communication in this country has made it possible for men to live further from their place of work without lengthening the time required to reach their factory or office or place of business. The automobile has released men from living in areas where they are dependent upon public transportation and time tables. Second, the availability of desirable housing and building space in the city is becoming increasingly limited. Residence in the fringe is one of the alternative opportunities for overcoming urban crowdedness. In addition to these basic reasons, personal desires motivate people to move to the fringe. Residents wish toown their own homes and raise some of their food. They wish to have a better place in which to rear their children; they are looking for lower taxes and cheaper living. Their personal reasons are a blending of sentimental ideas about rural living and the practical point of view on housing facilities and community life.

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Population studies reveal that residents of the fringe have several unique characteristics. On the average they have lived in the area a relatively short time compared with city and farm residents. Usually the households contain a larger number of people than do those in the city. The proportion of young people under twenty-one years of age is greater in the fringe than it is in the city. Usually there is a greater proportion of people in the productive years of life living in the fringe than there is living on the farm. There are fewer old people living in the fringe than in either the rural or urban areas generally. There are also fewer foreign-born and fewer Negroes than there are in the city.

As one moves from the urban center, the proportion of males in the population increases. Fringe people are more nearly like rural farm people in this respect than those in the city. Fertility rates are much higher in the fringe than they are in the city, but they are not as high as they are on the farm.

The fringe is an area of "normal" families. They are more likely to have a male head than those in the city. They consist of husband, wife, and child (or children) in a greater proportion of the cases than do metropolitan households. Broken homes are found less frequently in the fringe than in the city. The heads of households in the rurban zone are younger than those in other residential areas. Suburban families consist more frequently of those that are in the early stages of the family cycle than do city homes. Homes in

which there are children of school age are also found in a higher proportion of cases. Fringe dwellers tend to be home owners. They are in the process of purchasing their homes, and a disproportionate share of the income is often spent in liquidating the mortgage.

The fringe dweller is linked to the urban resident in attitude and interest as well as occupation. Among those that are normally classified as rural nonfarm residents, the fringe dwellers are the least rural in their attitudes.

OLDTIMERS AND NEWCOMERS

The suburbanization process is the atomizing of urban life. The place of residence and the place of work is increasingly being separated. The large scale dispersion of population that accompanies this process can threaten the existence of any church that is immobile or unadjustable. Changes of this nature bring with them certain elements of social disorganization. A small chapel in a village or open country area may suddenly become the only worship center for 10,000 new residents. A group of people with certain urban characteristics needs to be grafted into the rural social organization of the community. People with a provincial small-town outlook must mix with urbanites who look at things from the point of view of the "big city." The new residents will want to see the old rural community operate toward the achievement of urban goals and adopt urban standards of conduct. Often the new settlers are democratically jumbled with the old residents. Their different ways of finding satisfactions in life and their varying sources of income may mean that conflict will arise, or it may mean that there will be a minimum of social interaction between the oldtimers and the newcomers. Often the main thing that they will have in common is the use of the business facilities in town.

The clashes and tensions that develop in a suburban area are well illustrated by the study of Webster, New York. Three decades ago it was an agricultural community; today it is a suburb of Rochester. As new people came into the community and took up their places, they tried to accomplish reforms, especially in the schools. In a very short time there arose two groups: the villagers who belonged and the newcomers who were known as commuters. As both of these groups tried to satisfy the school needs of the community in the way that they most approved, the conflict in value systems became very apparent. The villagers were afraid of the political interference of the newcomers. The commuters did not like the conservativeness of the old community. In each community where newcomers try to extract the rural element, conflict will arise. The new way of life which evolves as a result of this conflict usually follows the urban pattern.

SECURING CHURCH PARTICIPATION

The suburban community is psychologically off center. Its center of gravity is located outside of its bounds. Occupationally and economically it is dependent upon the city. Many of the specialized organizations and institutions which suburban communities need are located down toward the heart of the city; hence the fringe area tends to lack a sense of community spirit.

The fringe is an area of relatively low social participation. This is due not only to its being psychologically off center but also to the heterogeneous nature of the area. The population is divided from the point of view of length of residence, economic status, and religious background. Efforts to or-

ganize persons living in the fringe have not been notably successful. Institutional leaders have often failed to recognize this heterogenity. Programs whic are not adapted to, or specifically directed toward, the socio-economic of ethnic groups in the fringe are likely to fail.

Another reason why it is difficult to organize people in this fringe is the fluidity of the population. The daily movement of people from the suburbs to the city for shopping and work takes on large proportions. For example during a typical business day in 1948 nearly 4,000,000 people moved into and ou of lower Manhattan. The suburbanite is on the go.

There is a lack of participation of fringe dwellers in religious inst tutions. Church membership on the fringe is not keeping up with the population growth rates. Not only is the fringe dweller isolated socially, but he often has other basic concerns. He must work on the unfinished room for which he did not have funds when his house was built. Or he spends his spare time in his garden. In a study conducted in the Williamsport fringe (Pennsylvania) 50% of the householders had gardens and 25% of them had livestock enterprises. These are all time-consuming. Church attendance must compete with these activities.

Much of the religious participation of the fringe dweller is centered in his old downtown church. For example in a Madison fringe (Wisconsin) study six out of ten suburban residents went to Madison for church services.

The suburban community is matriarchally-centered because the men are away from the community during the day. The husband who is a commuter arises early to go to town and arrives back home late in the evening. The church that is planning a program for fringe dwellers must adjust to this fact. The pastor' problem in the rurban zone is how to set up his program so that it will include the men or how to arrange his calling schedule so he may see the husband at hom

The great number of children in the fringe area not only creates a sp cial demand for Christian education, but it also places a heavy burden on the families in the community. The children are at an age where they create a financial problem in the household and are in competition with the church in its financial needs.

A NEW RELIGIOUS FRONTIER

Religious people have always recognized the call of the frontier. The look to Christ as the pioneer of their faith and to Abraham as the patriarch wh went out not knowing whither he went. The fringe is the new social and geographic frontier in America.

Since the beginning of settlement in America, religious groups have sought to provide adequate church buildings and programs for growing and moving populations. In the rapidly expanding suburb, historical churches have often been engulfed by the surge of new populations. Sometimes these churches are ap to reject the new people and refuse to make needed changes in their programs. Often a new church must be organized to provide worship facilities for the new people. It is the belt of development around the city where new churches are being built. A new urgency for church building has been created by the vast ne populations that are appearing in the fringe areas near the edge of our metropolitan cities.

Churches located in these peripheral areas that are desirous of presenting a more effective program should study the following observation of Dr. Douglas Ensminger about the function of the church, "As a social institution within a given community, the church is the creation of that community and it therefore tends to perform the activities that the people desire and sanction. This makes for wide variation in the way the church functions in different communities. Some communities look to the church to perform a wide range of activities. At the other extreme are churches that have little or no concern about community problems."

In one rapidly-growing community it was found recently that the churches were more receptive to newcomers than were other organizations. Churches had more contacts with the new residents than any other group, with the exception of merchants and business establishments. On the other hand, only a small proportion of the newcomers went into the old established churches in the community.

This seems to suggest that the religious needs of newcomers in a fringe area are quite specific. Churches that wish to survive or prosper in this type of community must be prepared to serve the new as well as the old resident. The officers and leaders of the churches must be sensitive to the unique needs of the new residents.

Here is an example of the type of situation that demands imagination and immediate action by local and national church leaders. A quiet rural community is often overwhelmed by the arrival of a large group of new residents within a relatively short period of time. A Pennsylvania rural community on the Delaware River in Bucks County recently found itself a bustling defense center. In addition to 5,000 steel mill hands, plus about 12,000 women and children, perhaps three times that number of other working folk are taking up residence. The church must be prepared to serve these new residents within a few weeks, not in a few years.

In another area in the East, fields that recently were used for potato growing suddenly became a suburban residential zone. Imagine your frustration if you were the superintendent of schools. School buildings and staff that were prepared to serve an agricultural community must suddenly serve a large suburban population. The church, wishing to prepare an effective ministry in the suburban area, will follow policies that have been found helpful in other areas.

DEVELOPING A RELIGIOUS PROGRAM

The experience of churches that have been successful in building an adequate religious program in the fringe seems to lend support to the following principles:

1. The local church will tend to be a creature of its environment. It will adapt its message and program to the needs of its local constituency.

2. The church in the suburban area will be prepared to minister to the needs of a particular social stratum. Aside from the external nature of the Christian message, the appeal of the church to professional and business men in the suburbs will differ from that of those who earn a living in the service and laboring groups. Those more highly educated -- the doctor, lawyer, or business executive -- will expect to hear the message for their souls delivered in a

more sophisticated manner than the bricklayer or the machinist.

3. The church in the fringe will avoid duplicating the services of other community organizations. However, it will try to coordinate its program with that of other agencies and seek to avoid unnecessary competition and possible con

4. Churches in the suburban area will provide a family program and adjust their program to the needs of the type of family that lives in their area.

5. Suburban churches will have a liberal policy about the use of their building for recreation and other community programs.

6. Again, suburban churches will be sensitive to the special needs of newcomers they move into the community.

7. Finally, Christian education will be given a high priority in the suburban church to provide training for the high proportion of children of school age

A CHANGING CHURCH POLICY

The impact of new populations in the fringe area and the development a new society demand a new orientation on the part of religious leaders who hope to serve fringe residents. A reconstruction of administrative channels that see to provide the religious services for suburbanites is demanded. An augmented rural program or an extended urban program will not be adequate. Neither can churches in the fringe area be left to find their own solution to their problem.

Local churches must have an attitude of brotherhood concerning their economic resources in this era when the mass migrations of population may inundate a community. Churches seeking to serve a suburban population require financial aid from other churches if they are to maintain an effective Christian program. This means that resources must be reallocated. To be sure, we must continue to assist rural churches as they adjust to declining population numbers or a changing population composition. But it does not seem wise to maintain the program of a rural church beyond its present needs or as a memorial to past remembrances.

Many suburban areas are growing so rapidly that churches which expand are inadequate almost before the paint is dry. There is demand for a sanctuary for worship and an educational building for young people. Pastors and trustees are often frantic trying to keep their building facilities expanding apace with the population.

Recently a new release appeared that seems to have a prophetic message with regard to the shifting resources of the church. A nineteenth century structure was discovered about eighty-five miles northwest of New York City in the foothills of the Catskills. It had been vacant for about thirty years. It was located in a community that was once a busy mill town, but there was no longer any use for the old church building because the old settlers had moved away. The structure was dismantled, with all the boards and timbers to be used in reconstruction elsewhere. It was moved to a new development in suburban Westchester County, where all the pieces were put back together again and the building was erected for present use. One would not want to suggest that it would be economic for all unused rural church buildings to be transported to the fringe, but it does seem indicative of the increasing need of assistance in the suburbs and the declining needs of rural areas.

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